

To Find *the* Frozen Fleet That Haunts *the* Pole



Explorer Amundsen Sets Out to Freeze His Schooner in the Circling Floes at the Top of the World to Verify the Eskimo Legend of Ghostly Ships, and Perhaps to Touch the Pole.

SOMEWHERE within those vast uncharted wastes of ice that lie due north of Bering Strait, a fleet of battered ships manned by frozen crews is swinging in a slow uncertain orbit about the North Pole.

Tales of this grisly flotilla have been coming back to civilization at odd intervals for a long time through the mouths of Eskimos—mighty hunters who ventured too far north and were caught in the ice packs of the Polar Basin. They were ships of tattered masts, the Eskimos said, ships that were glazed with frost from stem to stern, ships that were ghostly, silent and unoccupied save for a few rigid figures looking like men, which clung to the rails or stood on the companionways.

For a long time little attention was given these tales. But their persistent recurrence finally stirred the curiosity of adventurers and scientific men. And now finally an expedition has started out, headed by no less a person than Capt. Roald Amundsen, discoverer of the South Pole, to hunt down these grim wanderers of the north and to find out what manner of creatures they may have been—or still may be.

Capt. Amundsen's ship, Maud, sailed out of Puget Sound early in the summer, bound for Nome and then for the slow drift across the unexplored basin to the North Pole. The ship is equipped and supplied to withstand seven years in the Arctic.

If he follows out his plans Capt. Amundsen will voluntarily submit his ship to the situation that befell other Arctic adventures through misfortune or miscalculation. That is, he will let the Maud become frozen into the ice and drift at the will of the winter storms and the summer currents. If, as has been thought, there is a conspiracy to the drift of the ice field in the Polar Basin, the Maud will describe much the same route about the pole as these frozen ships.

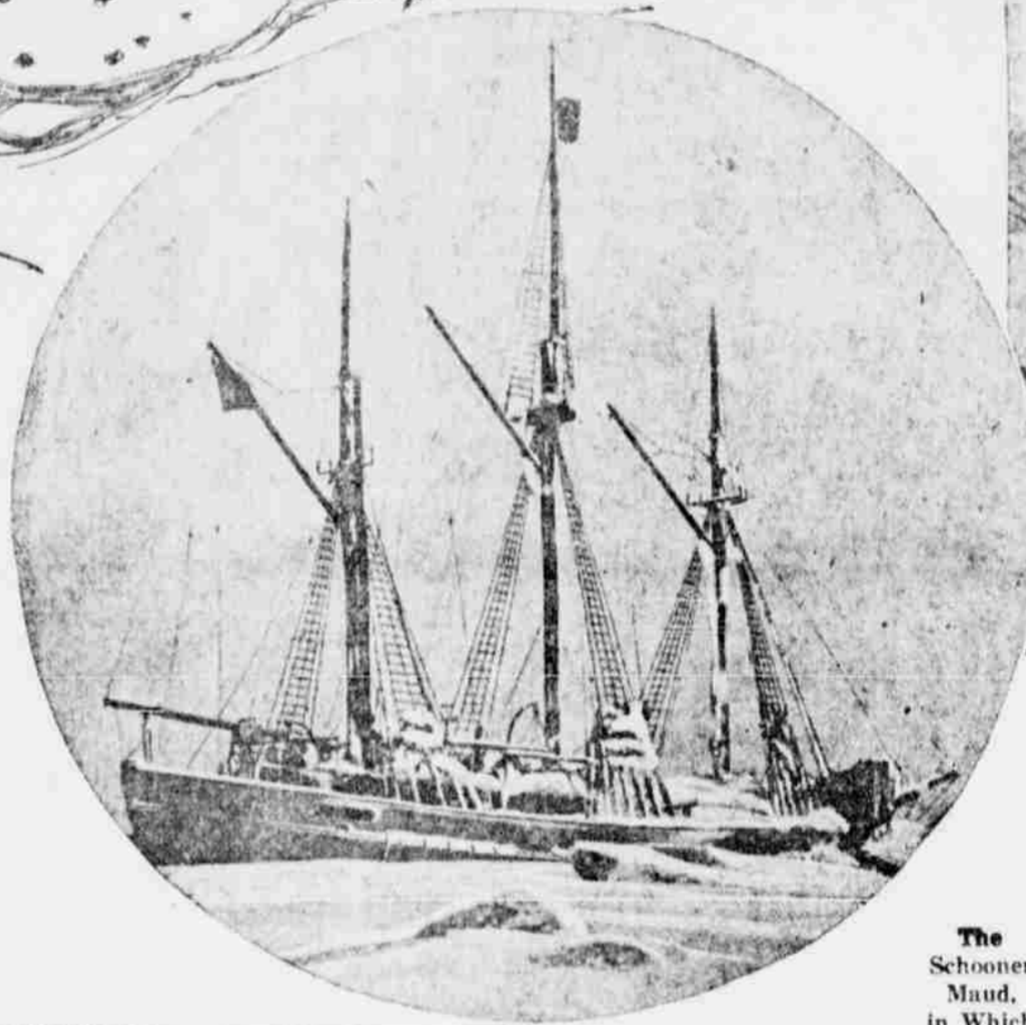
The expedition will thus be in a position to make investigations and explorations into a region that is still unplumbed by man. Whereas Capt. Amundsen will not be the first explorer to drift across the Polar Basin—it was accomplished in 1893-1895 by Fridtjof Nansen—he will be the first to carry the elaborate equipment necessary for the proper study of polar conditions.

"We are taking the finest scientific instruments that men ever used north," said Capt. Amundsen. "With two airplanes and elaborate photographic apparatus, we will be able to study the surface conditions for hundreds of miles on each side of the vessel—something that was impossible when dog sleds were used."

It is his hope, therefore, not only to solve the riddle of the phantom fleet, but many others. After the completion of the polar drift he hopes to be able to tell how the weather is made, whether the frozen Arctic ever will be made navigable, how deep the water is beneath the endless fields of ice, whether there are other lands never discovered in the unexplored region, of what the floor of the Polar was is made, and whether there is animal or perhaps human life there of which the world has never known. In short, he hopes to bring the 1,000,000 square miles of uncharted territory into the knowledge of man.

Four large bodies of land—Asia, Europe,

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The Schooner Maud, in Which

Capt. Amundsen Hopes to Float Over the North Pole in 1924. Here the Maud Is Shown Frozen in Last Winter Off the Siberian Coast.

pedition—Axel Heiberg Land, Ringnes Land, the Parry Islands and Alaska.

Two-thirds of the Arctic Ocean—and the unexplored regions so far as is known—is covered by ice fields that have an average thickness of six or seven feet. Various influences are brought to bear upon these tremendous floes and cause them to drift first in one direction and then another. But while the channels of escape from the Arctic Ocean into the larger bodies of water are many, they are also very narrow and for this reason it has been generally assumed that very little of the ice which finds its way into the Northern Atlantic comes from the Arctic regions.

As practically all necessary data is lacking, little can be told about the drift of the immense ice packs in the uncharted regions. The pack immediately north of Bering Strait, however, through the action of the winds and the currents, drifts in a north-northwesterly direction to that part of the Arctic Ocean lying between the Pole and Franz Josef Land. From there it turns southwesterly toward Jan Mayen.

Some of this pack may become detached and escape into the Atlantic through Baffin Bay and Davis Strait, or perhaps through the Greenland



Capt. Amundsen Beside One of the Planes with Which This Latest Polar Expedition Is Equipped.

Sea, but the amount is relatively small. For the most part, these bodies of ice, according to the general scientific belief, continue this Arctic drift and remain practically intact. In fact, it is considered possible that glacial formations may have taken place owing to the gradual thickening of these ice floes and that immense century-old icebergs—much larger than those discharged from Greenland into the Atlantic—may be floating around in the Arctic.

A further possibility that has suggested itself to explorers and Polar scientists is that ships and men, caught in the ice packs and gradually swept out into the wastes, have been securely frozen into these glaciers. The phantom fleet that Amundsen hopes to find, therefore, may be imbedded in the heart of some icy mountain. The stories of some Eskimos might mean that.

If this be the case, the phantom fleet, like the glacier that encloses it, may be centuries old. Scandinavian settlers in Greenland and Iceland often speak of ships that sailed away hundreds of years ago into the north never to return.

But one does not have to go to the tales of early Norse and Danish explorers for instances of ships that have been swept out into the uncharted region. Many vessels have so disappeared from time to time. And in one fell swoop the hungry ice pack, in 1876, carried off thirty whaling ships from the waters north of the American continent. Most of the men fled to the ice and escaped to Point Barrow and other points on the Arctic coast, but seventy refused to desert the ships. The slow but ceaseless drift of the ice finally swept them away.

Old-time explorers agree that it's perfectly possible for ships to remain virtually intact in the ice. They hold that once within the maw of the pack the ships would rest secure in their foundation and from then on the only damage would be that wrought by storms. The bodies of the crews, once frozen, would remain in their original composition indefinitely. The ice, they say, does a perfect job of embalming.

Leonhard Seppala and His Siberian Racers, Winners of the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth All-Alaska Sweepstakes. Upon Such a Team May Amundsen's Voyage Depend.



Six Eskimo Members of Amundsen's Crew in Everyday Attire.

Greenland and North America—together with innumerable smaller bodies, hedge in the Arctic seas and make of them virtually a huge ice-strewn lake.

But between the North Pole and Bering Strait lies the greater part of the Polar Basin and the greater part of the uncharted territory which Amundsen will invade, though part of it lies between the Pole and Franz Josef Land. Specifically the Polar Basin is bounded by the northern coast of Siberia from Bering Strait to the northern Taimur Peninsula, Franz Josef Land, Spitzbergen, Greenland, Grinnel Land—one of the places touched en route by the Peary Polar ex-

